WHAT THE AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE EDITOR
CAN DO ABOUT MOBILIZATION*

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The late Reuben Brigham, whom most of us knew and loved, constantly preached the philosophy that the job of the agricultural editor, within the Department of Agriculture and the land-grant colleges, was to give people, particularly farm people, the facts which would enable them to think for themselves.

Fundamentally, perhaps the biggest job of the college agricultural editor is to use every medium of mass communication to make the results of research available to the people at the earliest possible time.

The present mobilization program brings our job sharply into focus. It places upon us a great responsibility which none of us went to sidestep. We are ready and willing to do our part.

Among the many, many jobs, the Secretary of Agriculture has outlined as the job of Extension, is the manpower mobilization memorandum 1283. It assigns these tasks:

- 1. The development and use of easier, quicker, and more economical ways of doing essential jobs.
- 2. Problems of enterprise adjustments and work management to insure full employment of labor and equipment at productive work.
- 3. Instruction in the maintenance and repair of farm machinery and other equipment and in accident prevention.
 - 4. The training and use of women, youth, and other seasonal workers.
- 5. The promotion of community cooperation in the sharing of labor and equipment, the expansion of custom work, and the improvement of housing and community services for agricultural workers.
- 6. Other educational work necessary to accomplish the most efficient use of labor in production, processing, and marketing.

That last item is a mighty fine "Mother Hubbard" statement. As a matter of fact, if given the proper interpretation, it's a tent of the

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size and proportions of a circus tent--everyone in agriculture can get into that tent--and everyone can take part in the act. Such a statement can include each and every project of the Extension Services, the experiment stations, and the USDA.

We can get in such programs as soil conservation, pest control, human and animal nutrition, safety, fire prevention, housing, community development, rural health, child welfare—the works. It applies equally to research and to extension. And any one of these projects could well occupy the full time of the entire information staffs that any of the land-grant colleges have at their command.

In a recent statement the Federal Extension Service has restated its goals in terms of the emergency something like this: "An adequate national food and fiber supply requires well-informed, highly skilled, and energetic farm men, women, and youth. It requires farm people who have a deep-seated enthusiasm for their way of life and a sound understanding of their economic and social interdependence with urban life."

The entire long-time program of the colleges and the USDA of course points to more efficient production, better farms, and happier, more healthy people. Fortunately, if we accomplish these objectives, we will do much to achieve the national objectives of an adequate food, feed, and fiber supply.

These objectives are also related to broader ideas which involve the community and the Nation. Farm people are genuinely concerned—as is the total population. They want and need information which will help them to understand better their responsibilities of international leader—ship and the current war on nerves. And they want something basic, down to earth, that they can do something about as individuals and as groups of individuals.

First of all, it seems to me that we should make it clear that the job of the agricultural editor is a little more than that of a high-pressure propaganda agent. His job is an educational one. To be effective, he must follow the educational pattern of providing the people with the facts, rather than the emotional approach which so often rears its ugly little head to confuse the issues and to destroy confidence. I think we must--in times like these--remember the age-old law of public relations that no mass communications endeavor can be better than the program it represents. Let us, in our small way as professional people in the business of information, do all we can to make sure that the programs which our organizations undertake are sound and reasonable, and the methods they employ to carry out those programs are efficient ones.

In the days ahead, even more than in the recent past, we will be asked to widen the scope of our activities more and more. We will be expected to carry the information load for an ever-increasing number of programs. Most of these programs will be good, worthy of support. But unfortunately, any one of them can throw our information programs completely out of balance, and perhaps cause us to lose sight of our major objectives.

We will be plagued by the emergency programs which must be executed "today." Unless we temper our thinking with extremely good judgment we will constantly be guilty of the "too little, too late" accusation in our entire program. Let's not be guilty of chasing so many butterflies that the big game gets away. I believe there is real danger that this might happen in our activities, at a time when we must be on our toes, ready to roll with the punches.

In other words, in our endeavor to look ahead and expand our realm of influence to the new and broader fields, let us not forget our important jobs in the present emergency and mobilization efforts. Our basic job is the more efficient production of food and fiber. In a broad sense this is the objective of every branch of agriculture. If we accomplish this objective, farm folks, and indirectly, urban dwellers, will be in a much more receptive mood to accept their responsibilities in society.

We editors are supposed to be experts at helping in this production business. And we have done a great deal. We have the facts and figures to show it -- and we drag them out constantly to justify our existence. But the facts are we have not nearly got the job done.

Out in my State, one of the surplus food-producing areas, the potential for increased food production through more efficient methods has been barely scratched. In swine, for example, our average litter size is around 6. Yet we have hundreds of hog growers who consistently wean from 8 to 9 pigs per litter, and they put them on the market with 200 pounds less feed per 100 pounds of gain than the average. These good hog growers were the first to adopt the practices recommended by the college and the USDA.

Iowa poultry raisers have made tremendous strides in egg production -yet our demonstration flock owners are getting 80 to 100 more eggs per hen than the average indicates. About the same thing applies to milk production, to the beef cattle industry, and to sheep.

We have farmers who have stepped up corn production through proper land use, soil-conserving practices, use of good rotations, fertilizer, and adapted strains, plus recommended practices, by 30 to 40 bushels above the average.

When we know that our total corn crop in Iowa can be increased by at least 100 million bushels by merely using present recommended measures for the control of the corn borer and another 40 or 50 million bushels by the simple soil and water conserving practice of contouring our sloping corn land . . . or that we can boost our total feed supply tremendously over the long haul by the adoption of recommended rotation practices which employ liberal amounts of grasses and legumes . . . when we know that our present feeding efficiency can be improved immeasurably by the use of the knowledge now available in the field of animal nutrition . . . our job becomes quite clear.

It has been proved time and time again that more efficient farming practices are the stepping stones to better human nutrition, better homes, and happier, more alert families. It all adds up to the fact that agricultural efficiency is the keystone upon which to build our information programs. That is the educational job which the Secretary has given to the Extension Services.

Let us do first things first, and do them well.

I think we should remember that we as information people do not have the entire burden of a broader program in home economics and in agriculture resting upon our shoulders alone, although we are inclined to think so at times. Our job, first and foremost--our only job as I see it--is to make our administrators, our specialists, our scientists, and our field staff members the most effective workers possible. That goes whether they are in research work, extension activities, or are members of another agency. Our job is to support their programs in every way.

Just a word about cooperation with other agencies. Since we are representatives of the Department of Agriculture and constitute the only information arm of the USDA at the State level, it would naturally seem that we have responsibilities to assist those agencies in every way possible. In many States definite memoranda of understanding have been drawn up. All these agencies have large responsibilities in the total mobilization effort. From our vantage points as editors we can do much to help make the Secretary's memorandum on cooperation and coordination work. Through offering our services to the State mobilization committees we can be an active force working to quiet some of the confusion that is said to exist.

It must be pointed out, however, that the word cooperation implies a two-way road. Agricultural editors can do little to assist cooperating agencies unless there is a wholehearted understanding and a genuine desire on the part of an agency for help, and assistance. And there is no use kidding ourselves or the agencies that we have the manpower or the resources to do a total information job for them. Perhaps one of the most effective things we can do would be to help the various agencies at the State and community level understand how a mass communications program is organized and implemented. Our own associates in the land-grant colleges need that kind of understanding, but they are not the only ones by any means.

The danger, of course in all the States, is that we face the prospect of spreading ourselves so thin that we actually accomplish little. Limited staff and resources are, of course, the theme song of every group in agricultural service. And we in information work are sure that our shoes pinch the most. Mass communications are capable of carrying a bigger load in the total education program if given a chance.

We are well aware of the tremendous jobs ahead. How we are going to do them is, of course, the big question.

We editors want to assure you that we like being on the team. Oh, we'll probably criticize and gripe . . . we think we know all the answers . . . but we do our best work when the going is tough.